

Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
P.O. Box 21, 360 Smith Rd.  
Shirley, NY 11967  
631/286 0485

Federal Relay Service  
For the deaf and hard-of-hearing  
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://www.fws.gov>

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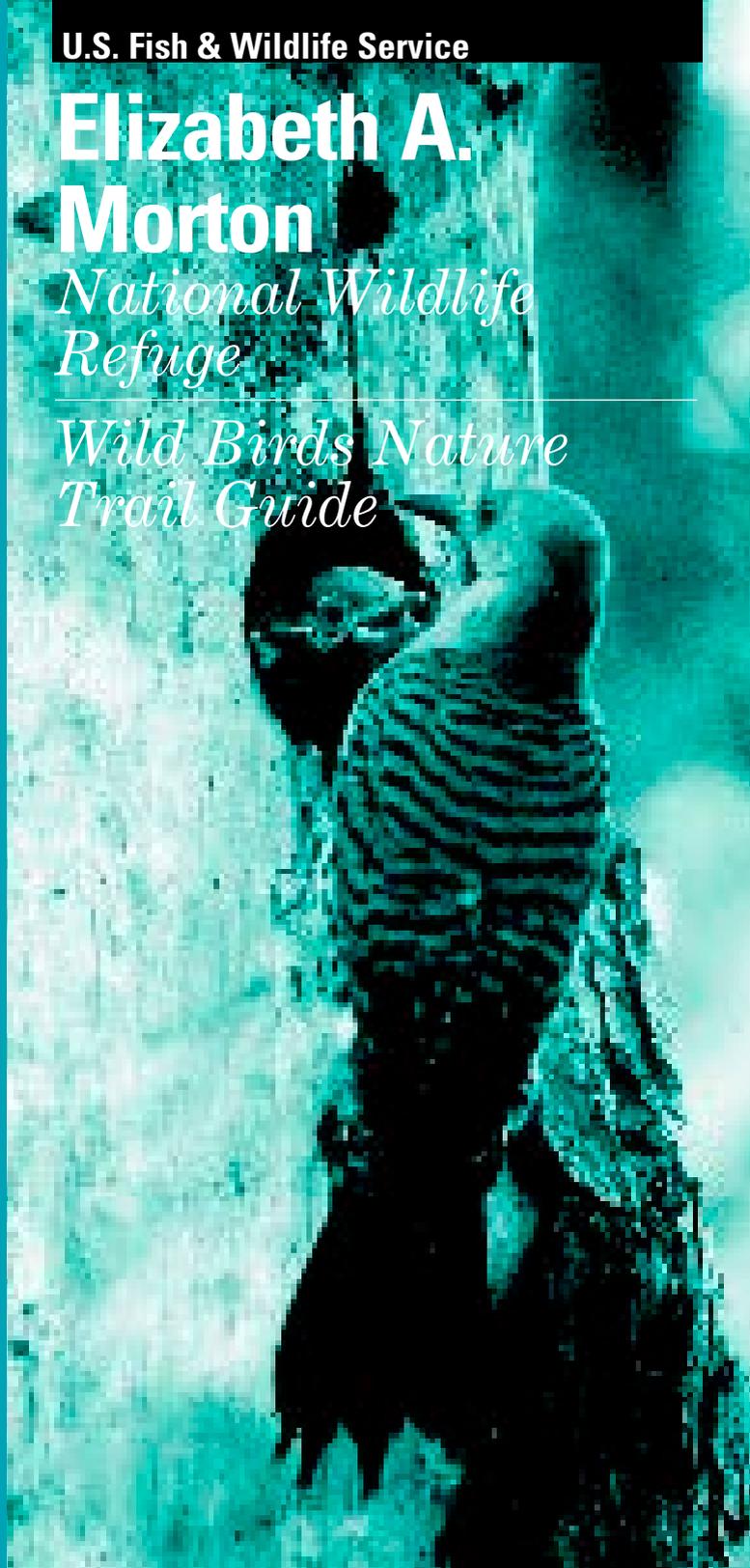
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Elizabeth A.

Morton

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*

*Wild Birds Nature  
Trail Guide*



*Welcome! The Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge, is part of the Long Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex and one of nearly 540 National Wildlife Refuges in the United States.*

*These refuges form the National Wildlife Refuge System. The system's main purpose is to provide and protect habitat for migratory birds, endangered species, and fish.*

*Morton NWR and the other eight units of the Long Island NWR Complex are situated along the Atlantic Flyway, a major bird migration path on the East Coast. Hundreds of species of waterfowl and other birds use the refuges for nesting, wintering and migratory stopovers, while other wildlife find important habitat year-round.*

### **For the Birds . . . And other wildlife, too!**

This goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Refuge System.

This 187-acre refuge supports a variety of wildlife and their habitats, but is truly important for migratory & resident birds. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service manages the refuge to protect not only migratory birds, but also endangered species and other wildlife. Morton's forests and fields are home to many types of songbirds, while the beach, bays and wetlands provide habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds. The diversity of habitats at the refuge attract and support many different kinds of birds & other wildlife. From ants to butterflies, ducks to songbirds, owls, hawks, mice, rabbits, and deer—all wildlife here benefit from the protection offered by the refuge.

### **Enjoy Your Hike!**



© Sheldon Pollack

*Black-capped chickadee*

Explore the Wild Birds Nature Trail (1.2-mi. from the kiosk, around the loop, to the beach & straight back; about an hour to walk) or go straight to the beach (1/3-mi.; about 20 minutes to walk one way). The terrain along the trail is relatively flat as you walk on a packed surface (the trail complies with ADA standards). Marked posts along the trail match the text in this guide.

**Trail hours:** 1/2 hour before sunrise to 1/2 hour after sunset.

*Morton NWR offers some of the most picturesque scenes on Long Island!*



USFWS



Andrea Stewart/USFWS

*Morton offers wildlife viewing opportunities year-round!*

### Things to Enjoy at the Refuge

There are many activities for you to enjoy during your visit.

- Wildlife viewing
- Hiking
- Nature photography & art
- Environmental education\*\*
- Bird watching
- Fishing\*\*\*
- Cross-country skiing
- Guided hikes\*\*
- Volunteer opportunities
- Special events

\*\* By appointment

\*\*\* New York State regulations apply, as well as special refuge rules.

### When to watch

Late October through early April offers the best times to view waterfowl on the refuge. The forest comes alive in Spring with the arrival of migratory songbirds, while chickadees, black ducks and white-tailed deer may greet you year-round.

In order to protect sensitive nesting birds, a portion of the beach is closed from April – August. During that time, binoculars help you to see the refuge’s beach-dependent wildlife.

### Help Protect Wildlife

Everything on the refuge is either a home or food for wildlife. Therefore, please remember...

- Do not leave bird seed along the trail—it attracts unwanted pests that can be harmful to birds & people.
- “Take only pictures, leave only footprints.”
- Use official trails only.
- Respect refuge boundary signs, closed areas and private property.
- Keep pets at home. Their presence disturbs wildlife.
- Keep a walking pace. Running triggers a flight response in wildlife.
- Keep your distance—respect nesting wildlife.
- Pack your garbage out with you.
- Keep noise levels low. You will have a better chance at seeing or hearing wildlife!

**If you need assistance, please ask for help by contacting refuge headquarters at 631/286-0485.**



Alex Krevitz

*Piping plover nest with eggs.*



USFWS

*Maintaining a bluebird box provides habitat for cavity-nesting songbirds.*

### **Feeding Wildlife Harms Them & You!**

Many well-meaning visitors to the Morton NWR have taken to leaving piles of bird seed on the trail & on the boardwalk railings in order to attract different species of birds that do not readily come to the human hand.

But birds are not the only wildlife eating these seeds; chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, fox, raccoon, and more recently, rats, will also partake of this convenient feast.

**Refuge staff report that these animals have become less fearful of humans, expect food, and are now quite aggressive.**

Protect yourself & wildlife; please don't leave piles of seed along the trail.

### **We're Already Protecting the Birds**

Since 1954, refuge biologists have used the best science and land management techniques to ensure healthy wildlife habitat (natural food, water, shelter & space) at the refuge.

### **Watch & Listen to Observe Wildlife**

Observing wildlife takes time, patience and quiet. Each time you visit, spend time at a new place. Take note of the plants, water, weather. Listen for bird songs & calls, leaves rustling, insects buzzing. Watch for movement. Look for tracks, trails, holes in trees, and feathers.

Although you may not see all of the wildlife that depend on the Morton NWR to live, their sounds and signs let you know they are here.

*Look for tracks in the sand and mud!*

Andrea Stewart/USFWS



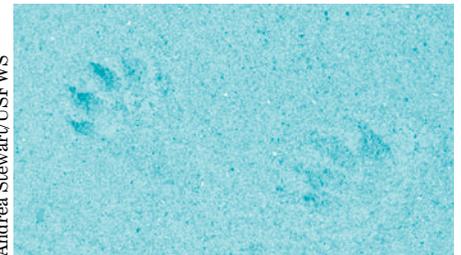
*White-tailed deer track*

Andrea Stewart/USFWS



*Raccoon tracks*

Andrea Stewart/USFWS



## Bottomland Forest—Layers of Habitat

As you walk, notice the many components of habitat in this bottomland forest. Just above sea level, the ground here is wet—even saturated—for much of the year. Small streams offer the water so necessary to wildlife survival, while the shrubs, trees & ground cover offer shelter and food.

Look at the forest from ground to sky and notice the layers made by the different heights of the plants. Certain birds feed in each layer. Ovenbirds and rufous-sided towhees find food on the forest floor. Catbirds and wrens look for insects in the shrubs' leaves; vireos, warblers, and tanagers find insects in the leafy overstory; and chickadees and titmice hunt for them on twigs and branches. Watch the trunks of the trees to catch a glimpse of a white-breasted nuthatch or a hairy woodpecker. Flycatchers and redstarts catch flying insects in the leaves of the uppermost branches.

*Listen for the one-note call of the white-breasted nuthatch, a nasal “yank!”*



© Ed Sambolin



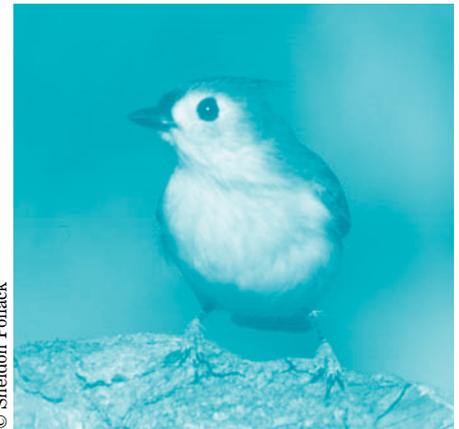
© Ed Sambolin

*Listen for the tapping of the hairy woodpecker as it searches tree trunks & branches for food.*

## Snag—Not Just a Dead Tree

Though some of the trees along the trail are dead (snags), they are very important to wildlife. Woodpeckers search for insects living in the rotting wood and may even nest in a hole they bore out with their strong beaks. Many songbirds, raccoons, flying squirrels and even ducks also nest in tree cavities. Eventually, the snag will fall to the ground and decay, enriching the soil from which new trees and other plants will grow.

*Tufted titmouse also nest in tree holes/cavities. Voice is a clear whistle saying, “peter, peter, peter, peter.”*



© Sheldon Pollack

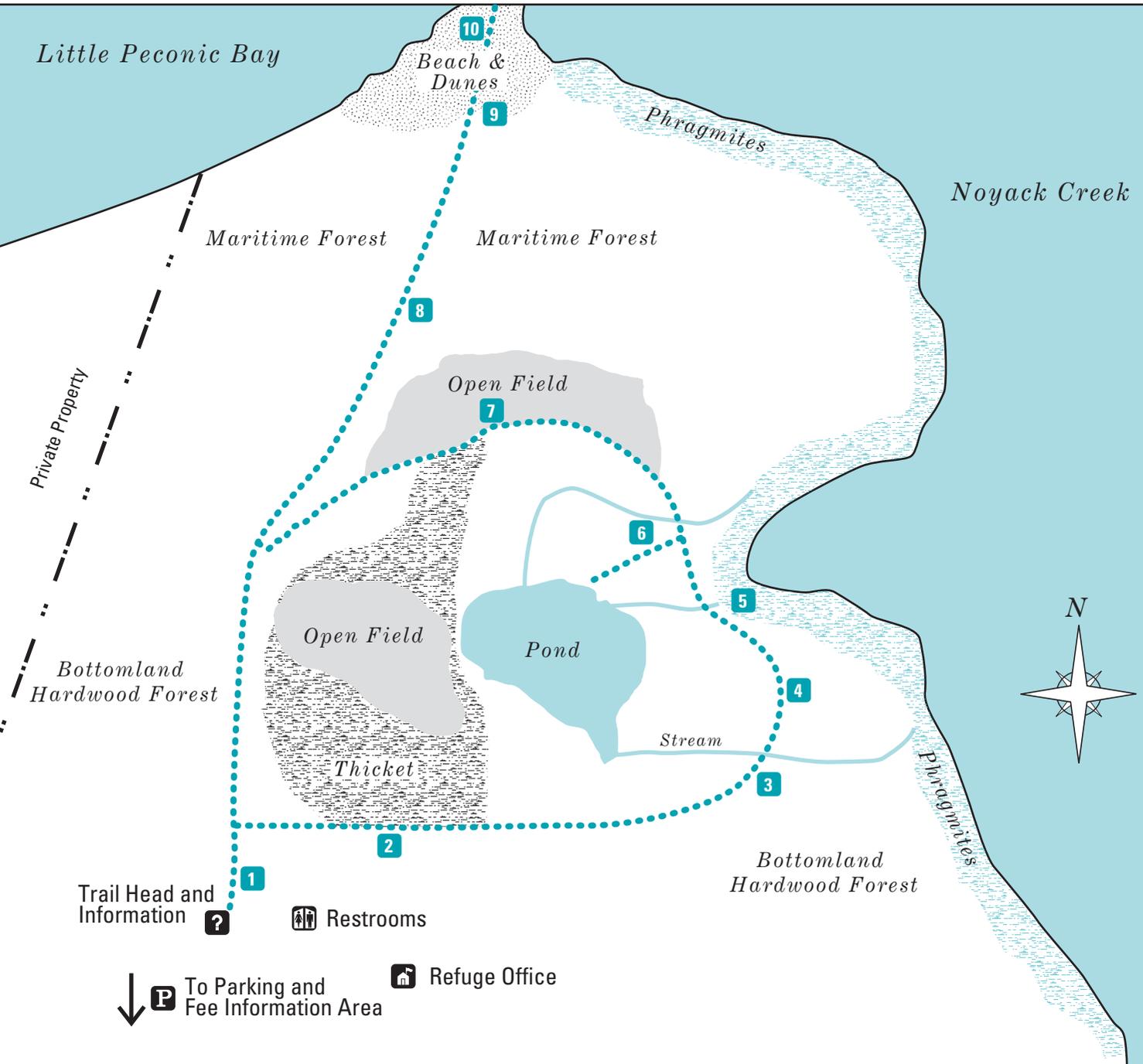
# Elizabeth A. Morton

## National Wildlife Refuge

### Wild Birds Nature Trail

**LEGEND**

 Refuge Office	 1 - 10 Trail Stops
 Restrooms	 Water
 Trail Head and Information	 Phragmites
 Parking Area	 Thicket
 Nature Trail	 Beach & Dunes



 To Parking and Fee Information Area
  Refuge Office

***Phragmites*—  
A Threat to  
Productive  
Habitat**

As you cross this small boardwalk, you are passing over a small stream that leads to a saltmarsh and Noyack Creek. But first, this stream must pass through the tall bamboo-like plant, *Phragmites*. These non-native, undesirable plants invaded when the marsh was ditched in an attempt to control mosquitoes, can “take over” open marsh water, and offer little value to wildlife.

The saltmarsh beyond the *Phragmites* is an example of one of the most productive areas in all of nature. Water-loving plants thrive here because of the wet, nutrient-rich soils, while many species of birds depend on wetlands for their supply of fish, worms, and shellfish.

From October through April, these wetlands support wintering waterfowl such as black ducks and oldsquaw. May through October brings several different kinds of shorebirds including sandpipers, yellowlegs, plover, and terns.

*Listen for the “konk-le-reee” of the redwing blackbird as you pass the refuge’s wetland habitats.*



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USFWS

*Jessups Neck—named for early settler, John Jessup*

**Wetlands for  
Wildlife &  
People!**

Did you know that most commercially valuable fish and shellfish spawn, nurse, or feed in wetlands? Wetlands act as filters, cleaning the water of pollutants before it flows into the ocean. They also act as sponge-like buffers between the land and ocean by absorbing excess water from storms & floods—often protecting our lives & homes.

Another great way to explore the Morton NWR is by canoe or kayak around Jessups Neck, which you’ll see when you get to the beach. Explore the wetlands up close, but please respect nesting shorebirds by keeping your distance and heeding area closed signs (*boat launching & landing are prohibited to safeguard federally protected nesting shorebirds*).

*Female wood duck*



© Ed Sambolin



© Sheldon Pollack

*Green heron*

## **Water Holds A Wealth of Life!**

Water is one of the key ingredients to wildlife habitat. This pond is a great source of water year-round and supports a wide variety of life.

Watch the water for a while. Did you glimpse a dragonfly or a water strider? Green frogs and bullfrogs also call this pond home, and may become a meal for a green heron or even a harrier (hawk). Ducks and painted turtles feed on the underwater plants here, which are also shelter for insect larvae, fish fry and tadpoles.

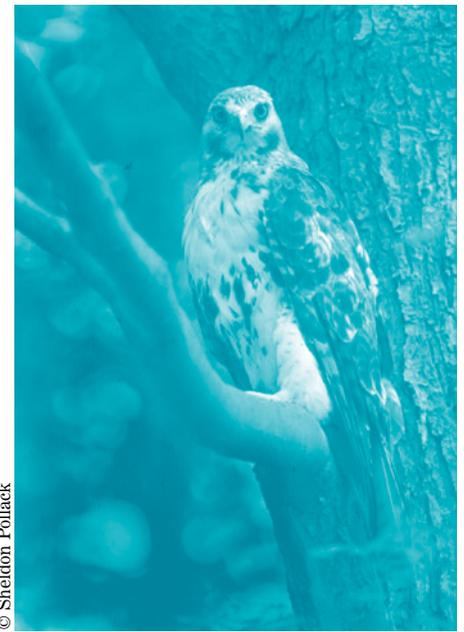
Note the nest boxes, put there by refuge staff to provide nesting spots for wood duck, tree swallows, and other cavity nesters.

A water control structure installed in this pond allows refuge staff to raise or lower water levels. Manipulating water levels is a management tool used to provide the best quality of habitat for waterfowl & other pond life.

*Bullfrog*



© Sheldon Pollack



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*Red-tailed hawk are at the top of Morton NWR's food chain, where they are the ultimate predator.*

## **A Field Day for Food Chains**

This small forest opening represents the native grasslands that once grew widely throughout Long Island. Grass seeds (grains) are an important and critical source of protein, carbohydrates and minerals for wildlife. Since grass grows throughout the summer, it provides a steady source of food for wildlife, especially grassland-dependent birds like sparrows, bobolink and meadowlark. These songbirds—along with the mice, voles, rabbits, and other wildlife that feed on the grass and insects—then become food for hawks, owls, and fox. It's all about the “food chain”!

Although grasslands often occur naturally in the wild, we maintain them at the refuge by mowing to preserve habitat for the animals that live here. Otherwise, areas like this would eventually become forested.



Mark Maghini/USFWS

*Eastern red cedar lines the trail*

### **Maritime Forests Serve Wildlife Year-round**

Maritime forests provide a protective buffer between the mainland and the sea. The cedar and other plants present here are tolerant of the rough salt, sun, spray, and wind conditions, thus thriving near the water's edge and offering unique habitat to wildlife.

From songbirds, hawks, and owls to rabbits, mice, deer, and raccoon, you will find an abundance of animals flourish here because of the year-round protection of the evergreen cedars. Wildlife use this forest as shelter from predators and the elements, as well as a source of food.



USFWS

*Morton beach dunegrass*

### **Beach Life Abounds at Morton NWR!**

Few plants, such as dunegrass, beach plum, and false heather can grow on the windswept and shifting sands of the beach. However, the wildlife here take full advantage of this beach & surrounding habitats.



© Sheldon Pollack

*The red fox uses a wide range of habitats, including the beach. Feeding on whatever is available, this keen canine eats grasses, berries, birds & small mammals. Though a rare sighting, you may see this hunter scanning the zone between beach & forest for its next meal.*



Bill Kolodnicki/USFWS

*Least tern skim the surface of the water and then dive in after small fish & other food. Nesting in colonies on sand, shells or gravel just above the high tide line, this tern will defend its eggs and young by dive-bombing beach goers.*



Mark Maghini/USFWS

*A staple food for the larger migratory shorebirds, horseshoe crabs live on mud or sand bottoms from the low tide line to waters 75 feet deep. This crab feeds on clams, worms & other small marine life. Females bury their eggs in the sand where they eventually hatch as miniature horseshoe crabs.*

## **Morton NWR— A Place for Threatened & Endangered Species**

The Endangered Species Act offers protection for the federally protected piping plover. This shore bird feeds on marine worms, crustaceans & insects and nests high on the beach, close to the dunes for protection from the spring tides.

The federally protected roseate tern will use the beach at Morton NWR for resting and feeding.

Other species, protected by New York State also take full advantage of the beach and bay habitats at Morton NWR. Terns and osprey grace the skies and waters as they search and dive for fish in the bay. They also use the beach for nesting.

Your respect for limited beach access during the breeding season has helped these sensitive bird populations succeed!



© Sheldon Pollack

*Much to the credit of citizen action, osprey have made a comeback from being listed in NYS as threatened to now being listed as a species of special concern.*

### **Watch for Osprey**

Often seen flying above the bays or nesting on platforms piled with sticks, this fish-eating hawk is a common migratory bird at the refuge from March - September. Watch patiently. You may see an osprey flying above the water, hovering, then plunging feet-first to catch its meal. After a successful strike, the osprey will carry its fish, head-forward, to the nest or other safe, high place.

### **Managed for Wildlife & for You!**

### **For More Information**



© Alex Krevitz

*Federally threatened piping plover nest on protected beach habitat*

The Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge is truly a haven for birds and other wildlife. Its diverse habitats of forest, wetlands, beach, and bay offer the food, shelter, water and space so critical to the survival of many of Long Island's wildlife species. Waterfowl and other migratory birds depend on the refuge as wintering, nesting, feeding, breeding or stopover grounds. Some wildlife, such as deer, fox, and chickadees & cardinals make the refuge a home year-round.

Whatever the season, refuge staff work to protect and enhance habitat for Morton's wildlife populations.

Wildlife comes first on all National Wildlife Refuges. However, some refuges can also provide wildlife-dependent opportunities to the public, like the nature trails here at Morton.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit!

Elizabeth A. Morton NWR is one of nine refuge units managed on Long Island. For more information about Morton or the other refuges, please call the Long Island NWR Complex Headquarters at 631/286-0485, or stop in the office at Wertheim NWR, Shirley, NY, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.